

***Powerhouses of Politics: Women Who Impacted the Cold War***

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

Did women really play an important role in the political theater of the Cold War? In short, yes. This thesis explores not only the question of whether women impacted the politics of the Cold War, but also how they did so and to what extent their activities were able to fundamentally alter the tensions and relations between countries in the West and in the East. Rather than act as a general study of the impacts women across the world had during the Cold War, this thesis studies the lives and contributions of five individual women—Margaret Thatcher, Nancy Reagan, Yekaterina Furtseva, Ethel Gee, and Samantha Smith. These women served in a variety of roles and capacities during the Cold War; from venerated politicians to supportive wives/lovers, to spies, and even ambassadors of goodwill; both for the Democratic West and the Communist East. As a conclusion to the five mini-histories for each woman, their individual stories are synthesized together to compare and contrast their actions and their abilities to enact lasting historical change.

## **Acknowledgments**

There are many people who deserve my thanks for their help throughout the process of writing this thesis. I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Alexander Kaufman, for his tireless efforts to ensure that not only was this project completed on time, but that I was able to retain my mental health while balancing the research and writing with my other obligations as a senior student. My other professors and peers have also been a constant source of support, encouraging me to do my best and reminding me that we are all in this academic pool together, revising and cheering each other on towards the finish line.

I have to thank both of my parents. Dad, thank you for inspiring me to write this thesis and giving me the motivation to continue writing even when I felt that I would never reach the end. Mom, thank you for being my constant support and cheerleader throughout this process, providing me with blankets, cocoa, and peace when I needed to focus on my writing. I could never have completed this project without you, and I love you both so much!

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## **Process Analysis**

The genesis for my thesis began when I was brainstorming potential topics with my father. For months I was aware that I needed to begin conceptualizing and doing preliminary research into a potential thesis idea, yet I could not seem to finalize a topic which I felt both motivated to discuss and was also worthy of being an honors thesis. My father enjoys reading and studying modern history with me, so we began brainstorming ideas together for concepts which I would enjoy researching, would be thesis-quality topics, and most importantly, he would enjoy reading as he gave me the perspective of my future audience. Ultimately, he mentioned that he would love to read a thesis that looked at how different women impacted the Cold War, knowing that I had recently done research on Margaret Thatcher, and I decided to choose that as my topic after seeing his interest. If he wanted to read that thesis, then it was likely others would want to read about that topic too.

My thesis topic has remained similar from the beginning when I initially decided on studying how different women impacted the Cold War to the conclusion of the project. I knew that I wanted to study the individual contributions of five different women, including Margaret Thatcher, Nancy Reagan, Samantha Smith, Yekaterina Furtseva, and Ethel Gee. At first, I was planning to write about the political, military, and social contributions of all five women during the Cold War. The only real change for my thesis topic came from consultation and guidance from both my thesis advisor, Dr. Kaufman, and Dr. Livingstone, who accepted my thesis proposal. Both advisors strongly recommended that I choose one aspect of life in which the women contributed, either the realm of politics, the military, or society at large, as attempting to focus on more than one would leave my thesis too broad and unfocused. Taking these words to heart, I narrowed my focus to the political impact each woman had on the Cold War.

A major revelation for the vast undertaking to which I had committed came when I submitted the first version of my thesis to my advisor. While preparing my thesis and outlining my ideas, I had planned to write upwards of six pages on each woman, though at the time I assumed that if I only had five pages about each woman then I would still have a lengthy thesis which met the requirements of the Ball State Honors College. The first version of my thesis which I submitted was approximately ten pages in length; however, it only contained one of the eight sections which I planned to include in my paper. This section was written about Samantha Smith and the impact her life and death had on the politics of the Cold War, and I found her story so interesting and compelling that I continued to write and elaborate her story far beyond what I had initially intended. It was at that point that I first truly understood the enormity of the topic I had chosen to undertake. Instead of realistically expecting to write a thirty-page thesis, I suddenly began looking at a thesis in excess of fifty pages. This was the first point in which I began to feel truly overwhelmed by my thesis, though it certainly would not be the last.

Another major moment of feeling overwhelmed came the submission of my second draft. With my second draft I submitted four of my eight sections and essentially tripled the length of my first draft. Even though I had already written so much and completed essentially half of my thesis by only the second draft, I felt incredibly upset and overwhelmed by my lack of progress. One required tool I had been using to help work through my thesis was a Gantt chart which allowed me to track my writing progress and schedule when each section would be completed. In my Gantt chart I had planned to have the entirety of the thesis completed to some degree by the second draft. The fact that I had only accomplished half of my thesis by the second draft was crushing as I felt as though I had failed to make as much progress as I had intended to do. It was at this point that I had to take a second look at my writing calendar and evaluate whether or not

the schedule I had created had been realistic. I had to understand that the schedule I had designed had been unrealistic to the point of optimistic folly, and I needed to accept the progress that had been made and simply continue to write instead of wallowing in frustration. However, without the requirements of creating a writing calendar and sticking to a schedule, it is almost certain that my writing would have fallen even farther behind, and the thesis may not have been completed before graduation.

Overall, this process of writing a thesis has been more challenging than I had initially assumed. It has become more challenging than I could have ever imagined simply through the sheer length of the paper. Prior to this project, the longest paper I had ever written had been fifteen pages. I assumed that I would essentially be writing a paper approximately twice as long for my thesis, not three to four times as long. I have struggled with writing diligently throughout this process as I generally find the best inspiration for writing comes at three in the morning the day the paper is due. Taking such an approach to a thesis like this is not feasible, and so I have been proud of my ability to write such a long paper over a period of several months instead of in a few weeks. What surprised me the most was that writing each section was not in itself challenging. I designed my thesis to essentially function as a conglomerate of five individual research papers about the individual political contributions of different women during the Cold War which still ties together as a cohesive thesis through the synthesis of all five stories. I would say that I am pleased with my final paper as I know how much time, energy, and research went into each part of the thesis. Though the project was difficult and has shaped how I plan to approach long-term projects in the future, I am proud of my writing and am excited to share my thesis with my father.



## **Introduction**

They are political ambassadors; they are spies for enemy nations; they are revered statesmen; they are wives. Who are these people, these women, who are not just the wives and daughters of powerful men but hold power in their own right to rival, and even surpass, their male counterparts? In order to explain their role and the impact they had on the world, it is essential to set the scene and describe the world in which these women lived. The year was 1945. Following the defeat of Germany in Europe and Japan in Asia, the world seemed it would be able to move forward to the future in relative peace. This would not be so. With the invention of nuclear weapons and rising tensions between the communist Soviet Union and the capitalist United States with its Western European allies, the world would be doomed to break in half and suffer under a period known as the Cold War in which it was West against East, Communism against Capitalism, Socialism against Democracy. This stark division of the world would last until 1990 with the collapse of the Soviet Union to economic, political, and cultural turmoil while the United States and her allies withstood under the ever-increasing pressures of an increasing global economy.

With such a long-lasting war, high-profile political leaders would become known as the main figures which helped create, prolong, and ultimately end the conflict. These figures include Joseph Stalin, Harry Truman, Nikita Khrushchev, Ronald Reagan, and countless others. Interestingly, all of these well-known politicians are male, and it is these names which first come to mind when reminiscing on the Cold War. Not a single name listed belongs to that of a woman. Does that then imply that women did not play a significant part in the Cold War, that they had no measurable impact? No. Contrary to popular belief, many women played vital roles in the politics of the Cold War, both in helping to prolong the tensions between the Soviet Union and

the United States and in ultimately ending the conflict between the two sides. Though there are women on both sides who played key roles in the realm of economics, cultural beliefs, and social practices, this thesis will examine the political role that women played in making distinct decisions and impacts which directly influenced the events of the Cold War for both the Soviet Union and the United States with her allies.

Who then are these women who directly impacted the politics and political decisions of the Cold War? In reality, hundreds of women made their impact in the political realm through various decisions made during the fifty-five-year duration of the war. For the sake of brevity and a more in-depth analysis of their characters, this thesis will look at the contributions made by five different women, both from the West and from the East, who can be clearly shown to have made an indelible mark on history and on the most impactful political decisions of the Cold War. These women are Margaret Thatcher, the first female Prime Minister of Britain who held her position from 1979-1990; Nancy Reagan, wife and unofficial key advisor to United States President Ronald Reagan; Yekaterina Furtseva, highest-ranking female member of the Soviet Politburo; Ethel Gee, British citizen and key member of the Portland Spy Ring; and Samantha Smith, a ten-year-old American girl who wrote a letter to Soviet leader Yuri Andropov and became an unofficial ambassador for the United States. All five will appear in this thesis in the order listed above, having several pages dedicated solely to each person as an individual before ending with a synthesis of all five women's actions to show how, even as individuals with different goals and intentions, they are all connected by more than their femininity. Thatcher and Reagan will be listed first as high-profile leaders in the West, both as an individual leader with power attached to her office and the wife of a leader with more discrete political power through influencing her husband. Furtseva follows as a counter-part to such strong Western leaders,

herself being a strong political leader in the East with her own authority. Gee provides an intermediary figure between the West and the East in her capacity as a Western citizen used for espionage for the East. Smith provides a surprise ending as she is a dark-horse figure, a mere child who became “America’s Youngest Ambassador” and sought for peace between the two sides among all else. All five women are, in their own right, crucial political figures from the Cold War, and it is high time that they all receive the attention and accolades they have earned.

## Margaret Thatcher



Figure 1: Margaret Thatcher forcibly gesturing toward the camera<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Margaret Thatcher’s Funereal Week, and Her Political Legacy,” Culturedarm, last modified 2018, <https://culturedarm.com/margaret-thatchers-funereal-week-and-her-political-legacy/>.

The first of many high-profile and powerful women to be discussed, Margaret Thatcher not only embodied some of the most prolific stereotypes of women with political power, she also actively sought to embrace and define her strength of character in her own terms. Boldly affirming her nickname of “The Iron Lady,” Thatcher accepted no hesitation or compromise either from herself or the people serving around her. One quote in particular stands to her own confidence and rather abrasive attitude toward her sense of importance in the realm of politics for the United Kingdom. Following her succession to the role of Prime Minister, Thatcher reminisced on the words of William Pitt<sup>2</sup> and commented that “Chatham famously remarked: ‘I know that I can save this country and that no one else can.’ It would have been presumptuous of me to have compared myself to Chatham. But if I am honest, I must admit that my exhilaration came from a similar inner conviction.”<sup>3</sup> This glimpse into her inner thoughts comes from her memoir entitled *The Downing Street Years*, in which Thatcher is able to explain not only her personal interactions with such well-known figures as American President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, but her individual assumptions and motivations on the policies and diplomatic interventions she controlled throughout her tenure as Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990. Though Thatcher could be and has been studied intensively for both her domestic and foreign policies throughout her time as Prime Minister, her actions will be scrutinized in the limited context of this thesis as a study of the impacts women had on the politics of the Cold War.

Of Margaret Thatcher’s many divisive decisions made during her tenure in office, her impact on the Cold War can be broken down into two main categories—those actions she herself

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<sup>2</sup> William Pitt, First Earl of Chatham and Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1766-1768 was referred to as simply “Chatham” by Thatcher.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 10.

undertook as the Prime Minister of Britain and her influence on United States President Ronald Reagan. Looking first at her own choices and policies, Thatcher was the key to Mikhail Gorbachev, successor to Yuri Andropov as General Secretary to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, being accepted by the Western powers as “a man with whom [they] could do business.”<sup>4</sup> Thatcher was criticized for her apparent fascination and almost smitten behavior with the young leader of the Soviet Union, and there were some who published their beliefs that Thatcher grew soft on her hard stance against Communism, socialism, and the Soviet Union after taking up with Gorbachev. Ever cognizant of her reputation, Thatcher went on in the first volume of her memoir to explain her approach to Gorbachev, stating that:

Unlike many who otherwise shared my approach to the Soviet Union, I was convinced that we must seek out the most likely person in the rising generation of Soviet leaders and then cultivate and sustain him, while recognizing the clear limits of our power to do so. That is why those who subsequently considered that I was led astray from my original approach to the Soviet Union because I was dazzled by Mr. Gorbachev were wrong. I spotted him because I was searching for someone like him.<sup>5</sup>

Thatcher understood the importance of finding an ally within the Soviet Union. While she was a virulent anti-Communist and firmly stood by that conviction throughout her time as Prime Minister, she also understood the necessity of forming a stable relationship with the Soviet Union as well as the economic hardships faced under times of great stress and uncertainty such as those dealt with during and leading up to a war.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 463.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 452.

Thatcher was quick to announce her curiosity in the new Soviet leader, not only to the press as a form of political maneuvering, but also to her allies and advisors to recruit them to her point-of-view. It was of immense importance that her advisors share her opinion as Thatcher had no time or patience to argue with those who could not agree with her. One occasional advisor to the Iron Lady was George Urban, an academic who occasionally advised her on foreign policy, and Thatcher recalled telling him that “I was talent-spotting in the Soviet leadership, and that's how Gorbachev came to visit me here at Chequers. I immediately hit it off with him and that's when I coined the phrase ‘we can do business with him’ . My whole relationship with Gorbachev was... based on that first meeting.”<sup>6</sup> By choosing to support Gorbachev, Thatcher took an important stance which would ultimately lead to the triumph of the West over the East with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thatcher proved to the West, and particularly to the Americans, that Gorbachev could be trusted and that the Americans would neither be remiss nor alone in choosing to lessen tensions and deal directly with the Soviets. She also proved to Gorbachev that the West could be amenable to open, honest discussions to lessen the tensions with the Soviet Union and seek a more peaceful global future.<sup>7</sup> Without Thatcher taking the initiative to find common ground with Gorbachev and promote his character to her allies, it is possible that the Cold War could have drug on for many more years. President Reagan was warned by his advisors that no Soviet could be trusted, and that Gorbachev was simply another lying Communist, yet Thatcher's resolve and conviction convinced the majority of the main Western leaders that Gorbachev was a new breed of Soviet with whom they could do business.

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Benedict Dyson, “Cognitive Style and Foreign Policy: Margaret Thatcher's Black-and-White Thinking,” *International Political Science Review/Revue internationale de science politique* 30, no. 1 (January 2009): 43.

<sup>7</sup> The Chequers Meeting in 1984 between Thatcher and Gorbachev was famous for both world leader's openly hostile and frankly rude manner toward each other. While neither leader spoke using niceties about the other, Thatcher and Gorbachev reportedly both preferred to insult each other honestly rather than to hide behind political niceties.

Margaret Thatcher also played a critical role through her influence on American President Ronald Reagan. Throughout modern political history there have been numerous mentions and allusions to the “special relationship” between the United States and the United Kingdom. This relationship is best defined as the unofficial alliance held militarily, politically, and culturally between the United States and its former colonizing country, the United Kingdom. During the Cold War this relationship was of vital importance as it allowed the democratic British and Americans to stand firm as part of the West, opposing the Communist Soviet Union in the East. Thatcher knew that while she represented the interests of the United Kingdom, she was also a de-facto representative for Reagan and would have to go into negotiations with the East with this knowledge in mind. In her memoir, Thatcher made a point to discuss her takeaways from her first official meeting with Gorbachev in Great Britain, in which she concluded that:

I knew that to some degree I was being used as a stalking horse for President Reagan. I was also aware that I was dealing with a wily opponent who would ruthlessly exploit any divisions between me and the Americans. So I bluntly stated—and then repeated at the end of the meeting—that he should understand that there was no question of dividing us: we would remain staunch allies of the United States.<sup>8</sup>

Thatcher was able to hold her own in the political theater of the Cold War. She was a woman with strength and power, backed by her own tenacity. She understood and accepted that she was not alone in standing for the political decisions of the West. However, she also proclaimed her own independence in making decisions and standing her ground for her beliefs. Thankfully for

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<sup>8</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 462-463.



President Reagan, both he and Thatcher were able to work together quite well. Thatcher mused, “one reason why President Reagan and I made such a good team was that... we shared the same analysis of the way the world worked.”<sup>9</sup> Both she and Reagan were stubborn politicians with hardline views about the evils of Communism and the benefits of Capitalism. They both also saw the world as being black and white, friends against enemies, with little acceptance of moral gray zones. Ronald Reagan himself was aware of Thatcher’s influence on him. In November 1985, Gorbachev and Reagan met in an ice-breaking summit in Geneva. “Maggie was right,” the president told his aides afterward. “We can do business with this man.”<sup>10</sup> The president had a close friendship with Thatcher and was not too proud to admit when she was right.

One interesting area of foreign affairs in which Thatcher held a great deal of influence was over SDI, otherwise known as the Strategic Defense Initiative or the “Star Wars” Defense Program. Essentially, SDI was a program concocted by the United States and pushed for by Ronald Reagan, which was meant to act as a missile defense system against ICBMs, or Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, sent by the Soviet Union or other hostile nations. Understandably, the Soviet Union was incredibly concerned by SDI and was willing to go to most any lengths to end the program before it could become successful. Thatcher herself was conflicted over SDI, viewing Reagan’s opinion of the program as foolishly optimistic at best and at worst incredibly dangerous to the safety of the West. While in public, Thatcher vociferated her support for the president’s program, in private she would turn back and voice her poignant concerns about spreading the message that SDI would lead to a world in which nuclear weapons would no longer be needed. Thatcher herself recalled a conversation with Reagan, during which

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Moore, “How Thatcher Won the Cold War: Britain's 'Iron Lady' pushed Reagan to grasp Gorbachev's potential,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 26-27, 2015.

she told him that “I thought it was important to avoid exaggerated rhetoric about SDI. We must not get into a situation where people were told that nuclear weapons were wicked, immoral, and might soon be rendered unnecessary by the development of defensive systems... I think that the President took this point.”<sup>11</sup> Thatcher knew the importance of maintaining a united front in the press to posit the image of strength against Communism. She also understood that to try and argue for a future without nuclear missiles was not simply idealistic, it was downright dangerous for the West. To argue against the continuation of nuclear weapons, according to Thatcher, would weaken the West by having the people question the necessity of such weapons and even begin dismantling them, while the Communists in the East would take advantage of the confusion and weakened military state of the West to build up its nuclear arsenal. To this point, President Reagan did in fact retrain from using more exaggerated rhetoric about SDI, ensuring that he still proclaimed the necessity of nuclear weapons in the future. Without the influence of Margaret Thatcher, his own impassioned discourse could have run away from him and placed the United States, and the West as a whole, in a significant amount of instability.

Margaret Thatcher clearly was a strong woman who not only was able to make her own decisions about foreign and domestic policy as it influenced the Cold War, but who also used her brusque charisma was used to great effect in influencing the other great politicians of her age. Both Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan understood Thatcher’s prominence and sway on the political stage and truly listened to her thoughts and opinions on current affairs before making potentially destabilizing decisions which would affect relations between the West and the East. Ronald Reagan in particular thought fondly of the Iron Lady, though perhaps it should not be surprising that such a senior politician was so willing to listen and accept the inherent power of a

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<sup>11</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 469.

female politician. After all, his wife Nancy Reagan played an even greater role in his life, and her influence impacted not just Ronnie, but internal affairs for the entire United States of America.

## Nancy Reagan



Figure 2: First Lady Nancy Reagan standing alongside US President Ronald Reagan<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Kathy Cody, "What Every Female Business Leader Can Learn From Nancy Reagan," *Fortune*, March 10, 2016. <http://fortune.com/2016/03/10/nancy-reagan-leadership-lessons/>.

Following the example of a renowned political figure known for her abrasive, tough-as-nails attitude is a woman known more for supporting her husband than for her equally tenacious and strong character. Nancy Reagan is distinct in her role as a supporting figure, not a woman with direct political power to make her own decisions without requiring the approval of others. Rather than being directly elected into office, Nancy Reagan's political power and influence comes into play through her ability to impact the decisions of her husband, Ronald Reagan, president of the United States of America from 1981-1989. Officially, Nancy Reagan's title was "First Lady of the United States," though this position did not grant her any direct political power with which she would be able to make decisions and enforce policies without the support of her husband. Her position was more similar to that of an elderly stateswoman, a person who should be treated with respect and consulted about certain decisions without the authority to enforce their beliefs and recommendations. Unlike many other "First Ladies" who came before her, Nancy Reagan had a particularly high level of influence on her husband. It was reported by Ronald Reagan himself that when he was separated from Nancy, he felt anxious and uncomfortable, missing her presence and strength at his side. This goes to show the true depth of his reliance on his wife, and as such shows just how much influence she would have had on the decisions and policies he presented to the American people during the Cold War. While she may not have been the one at the podium making speeches, or sitting behind the desk signing executive orders and new bills, Nancy Reagan was able to utilize her influence on her husband to be able to influence the politics of the Cold War from behind the veil, along with using her own set amount of power as the First Lady of the United States to make behind-the-scenes changes and impacts in her own way.

Nancy Reagan had a great deal of influence over internal affairs for the White House and with the White House staff. As the First Lady, one of her duties was to help arrange state dinners for the arrival of important foreign visitors. In 1987 when Mikhail Gorbachev and his wife Raisa visited the United States, Nancy was put in charge of organizing the state dinner for his visit, including the seating chart for the important foreign and domestic political dignitaries in attendance. In her memoir *My Turn*, Reagan discusses her reasoning for arranging the seats so that Gorbachev would sit next to a more combative politician than he may normally have eaten with. At the dinner, she mentioned that next to herself and Gorbachev, “I put Richard Perle, the brilliant and controversial assistant secretary of Defense. Richard has very strong views on the Soviet Union, and he isn’t shy about expressing them. Gorbachev seems to enjoy a good give-and-take, and he likes it when people challenge him.”<sup>13</sup> It was well-known, at least by the Reagans, that Gorbachev was no stranger to confrontation and rather preferred honest, direct conversations with the potential to insult one another than the more sensitive political work-around talk that would usually end with miscommunications and half-truths. By manipulating her influence and strategically seating Gorbachev with the Secretary of Defense, Reagan was able to ensure the two men would converse over dinner, and by the end of the night discussion were already in motion to reduce the number of conventional arms between the two nations to lessen military spending for both superpowers.

Nancy Reagan had a great deal of influence over the day-to-day affairs of the White House. Her most infamous impact on the state of affairs in the White House was over her battle with Chief of Staff Donald Regan. It was well-publicized that Mrs. Reagan and Regan could not

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<sup>13</sup> Nancy Reagan and William Novak, *My Turn: The Memoirs of Nancy Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1989), 349.

stand each other, Donald Regan going as far as cursing out the first lady and hanging up on her, while Nancy continually pushed her husband to fire Regan. Their first major conflict came after President Reagan had been shot and was recovering in the hospital, at which time Regan wanted to bring the president back out to the public to continue with his administration while Nancy Reagan vehemently opposed the haste toward making a public appearance. Their feud came to a head during the Iran-Contra Affair in which Regan was adamant that he had been unaware of the situation to which the first lady essentially proclaimed him a liar. She recalled being told by Regan that nothing happened in the White House without his knowledge, so for him to not know of the misuse of funds should have been impossible. In her memoir, Nancy Reagan addresses the issue of Regan's dismissal several times, always claiming that she did not have the critical role which the press claimed she played. She also argues against Regan's description of her in his memoir as a "dragon lady" and claims that if she had been as powerful and vitriolic as described in the press and in Regan's memoir, the chief of staff would have been fired several months earlier.<sup>14</sup> Still, there is no doubt that Nancy Reagan played a vital role in Regan's dismissal from the White House which resulted in a great boost of confidence for the American people who no longer trusted the former chief of staff following his involvement in the Iran-Contra Affair.<sup>15</sup> Though many in the press took the opportunity to slander and blame Nancy Reagan for overstepping her bounds as the first lady, other journalists defended her. Judy Mann, a columnist for the *Washington Post* who was normally quite critical of the Reagan administration and Nancy Reagan in particular defended her actions against Donald Regan, arguing that "First Lady Nancy Reagan managed to do what nobody else was able to do—namely, rid the administration of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>15</sup> The Iran-Contra Affair was a political scandal under the Reagan administration where it was discovered that the United States was secretly trading missiles and arms to free American hostages in Lebanon while using the funds from the deal to support armed conflict in Nicaragua.

someone who was literally crippling the Presidency. White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan hung on and on in an unprecedented display of supreme arrogance, placing his own self-interest above that of President Reagan... the gentlemen who could exercise the greatest influence on the president couldn't do the job. Mrs. Reagan did the dirty work for them."<sup>16</sup> By enabling the dismissal of Donald Regan, Nancy Reagan was able to regain public confidence for her husband and continue support for his policies and decisions during the Cold War.

One interesting political impact from the Cold War came from the interactions between Nancy Reagan and Raisa Gorbachev. Raisa was the wife of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, and while the United States President and the Soviet Premier were working toward détente, their wives infamously could not stand each other. "From the moment we met, she talked and talked and talked- so much that I could barely get a word in... my fundamental impression of Raisa Gorbachev was that she never stopped taking. Or lecturing, to be more accurate... she even lectured me on the failings of the American political system. I wasn't prepared for this and I didn't like it."<sup>17</sup> Both women understood how to behave on camera so as to promote an atmosphere of cooperation between the two superpowers, yet for Nancy Reagan to have such intense feelings of dislike toward a fellow stateswoman was a sign of the impending political turmoil between the US and the USSR in the 1980s. Nancy would not have held her tongue with her husband, and as she had a high level of influence over him he would have been more open to her opinions coloring his own and impacting his dealings with the Soviets. Her opinions about Raisa would have colored her overall opinions about the Soviet people and the Soviet Union. With her ability to sway her husband's opinion and advise him on how to proceed in negotiations

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<sup>16</sup> Reagan and Novak, *My Turn: The Memoirs of Nancy Reagan*, 334.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.



with foreign powers, Nancy Reagan may have had a larger impact on the tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union than has been recorded.

As has been mentioned previously, Nancy Reagan had an inordinately high level of influence over Ronald Reagan. She acknowledged her ability to sway him and compel him into taking certain actions when discussing his first meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev. Reagan admitted to pushing her husband to meet with the Soviet leader, saying “I encouraged Ronnie to meet with Gorbachev as soon as possible, especially when I realized that some people in the administration did not favor any real talks. So yes, I did push Ronnie a little.”<sup>18</sup> For Nancy herself to admit the level of influence and sway she held over her husband was a sign of just how much power she held behind-the-scenes. Reagan was exceptionally concerned with the legacies of both herself and her husband, and as can be noted in her memoir has always been careful to try and paint herself in the best light possible. By accepting that she had the ability to push the President of the United States into such a critical, high-profile meeting, it can be said without a doubt that the First Lady had the ability to sway the President’s opinion, and thus his domestic and foreign policies, on a great number of issues.

Nancy Reagan was a woman who had clear values and beliefs with little tolerance for those who stood against her and her husband. Aware of the historic time in which she lived, the first lady was always concerned with the responsibility she and the president had on the American people and the world at large. She fully understood the delicate political tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States during the 1980s and went out of her way to advise her husband on the best paths to ease tensions, as well as to take matters into her own

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 337.

hands to help improve confidence in the Reagan administration. Though she may never have acknowledged or even known, she shared interesting similarities with a Soviet politician, a woman who spent a great deal of her political career protecting and supporting the political decisions of a powerful male figure. Just as Nancy Reagan supported her husband, Soviet woman Yekaterina Furtseva supported her superior, Nikita Khrushchev, and went on to become one of the highest-ranking women in Soviet politics.

**Yekaterina Furtseva**



Figure 3: Yekaterina Furtseva looking away from the camera<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “Yekaterina Furtseva,” Google Arts and Culture, accessed April 2, 2019, <https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/m07xxzt>.

The first woman featured in this thesis who is most likely unknown to Western audiences is Yekaterina Alexeyevna Furtseva, who is quite remarkable as the first elected female member of the Soviet Politburo during the Cold War.<sup>20</sup> Much like Margaret Thatcher, Yekaterina Furtseva was able to climb the political ladder and earn a spot in the highest echelons of Soviet politics. Her career was dotted with praise and criticism, much like any politician, though she is remarkable for having the strength and political understanding to have been able to navigate through her critics and retain positions of significant political power in a male-dominated society. Regrettably, little is known about Furtseva on a personal level. Unlike the major Western politicians, she never published a memoir to share her opinions and point-of-view on her actions prior to her death in 1974. It was reported by one author that “little is known about the young woman’s personality. She was described by a Westerner who observed her later as ‘solid, capable and seemingly warm-hearted.’ In the Komsomol she reportedly displayed a ‘domineering disposition,’ a demeanor that may have helped at least to establish an early reputation in Party circles.”<sup>21</sup> Though her personality and inner-thoughts remain relatively unknown, her actions can and should still be viewed objectively to attempt to understand her motivations and the impacts of her life on the political climate of the Cold War.

It is important to understand that very little information has been published in English about Furtseva beyond encyclopedic entries and allusions to her influence through the published works on figures such as Nikita Khrushchev. There are some books and articles published in

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<sup>20</sup> Yekaterina Furtseva’s name has also been spelled as “Ekaterina Furtseva,” most likely due to the spelling of her name in Russian as “Екатерина Алексеевна Фурцева.” Her name will henceforth only be spelled as “Yekaterina” though some sources may allude to her as “Ekaterina.” Also, it is important to note is that the Soviet Politburo was the highest policy-making government authority in the Soviet Union.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth N. Ciboski, “A Woman in Soviet Leadership: The Political Career of Madame Furtseva,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 14, no. 1 (April 1972): 3. The Komsomol was a political youth organization controlled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Russian which provide more information about her life, but they are not easily disseminated into an English thesis. That being said, those articles which discuss Furtseva and her political impacts are objective and unbiased, and truly examine the entirety of her decisions as a politician. One of the most insightful sources about her life actually comes from Kenneth N. Ciboski, an American professor of political science with an extensive background of articles published about the government and policies of the Soviet Union. His article “A Woman in Soviet Leadership: The Political Career of Madame Furtseva” was published in English with an abstract in French in April 2015 for the *Canadian Slavonic Papers* journal. It is from this article that the majority of information about her life is drawn.

Furtseva’s political career can be broken down into two major sections—her time working under Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, and her time working under successive premier Leonid Brezhnev. She first entered politics through her support of Khrushchev as he fought for the position of leader of the Soviet Union following the death of Joseph Stalin. Many high-ranking officials wanted to lead the Soviet Union following Stalin’s death, and Khrushchev had to rely on allies to defeat his political adversaries and claim power for himself. This is where Furtseva first truly enters the political history of the Soviet Union. Unlike the political representatives placed in the countryside who were constantly moved around to different towns and villages by the directive of the party, Furtseva “graduated from the Moscow Lomonosov Institute of Chemical Technology (and later the Higher Party School) and rose through the Moscow apparatus to become second and first Party secretary of the Moscow urban committee, positions she held for eight years.”<sup>22</sup> Her ability to hold such distinguished posts in Moscow for

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<sup>22</sup> Joel C. Moses, “Indoctrination as a Female Political Role in the Soviet Union,” *Comparative Politics* 8, no. 4 (July 1976): 537.

a significant amount of time was proof that Furtseva understood how to navigate the world of politics and support key politicians to ensure her own survival in her chosen career.

Furtseva was one of the key supporters responsible for ensuring Nikita Khrushchev's rise to power as the leader of the Soviet Union. As Khrushchev was working on centralizing his power base and earning the position of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the highest political role in the Soviet Union, Furtseva knew how to stir up mass emotion in his favor. Furtseva decided to target cumbersome administrative operations, and initially she aimed her criticisms toward "the Ministry of Agriculture's less-than-adequate mobilization effort, [and] she offered a solution that may have been against her Moscow organization's best interest: to transfer persons out of Moscow and into production in the rural areas. Her proposal was certain to please Khrushchev, who by now was consolidating his power as First Secretary."<sup>23</sup> Her plan, in line with Khrushchev's opinions, was to target the inefficient bureaucratic operations of the Soviet Union which prevented the steady growth of the party in both the countryside and in Moscow, since too few trained Communists were being deployed in the rural areas to mobilize the full might of the Soviet Union. Later in her career she also criticized the excessive rate at which some young politicians were transferred out of Moscow as she felt that by sending so many politicians into the rural areas detracted from the construction efforts in Moscow. Through these public campaigns to strike back against the old policies of the Soviet Union, Furtseva helped to pave the way for Khrushchev and his ideas to take hold of the country with the support of the people behind them.

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<sup>23</sup> Ciboski, "A Woman in Soviet Leadership," 5.

One of Furtseva's most impactful moments from her career under Khrushchev was when she saved his political career in 1957. Khrushchev was well-known for his de-Stalinization campaign as he worked to try and dismantle the cult of personality surrounding the former leader of the Soviet Union. He also made efforts to reform and reorganize the Soviet industrial bureaucracy which he felt was inefficient.<sup>24</sup> These efforts to reform the Soviet Union and remove Stalin from a deified position in the minds of the people were not popular among all Communists and there was an Anti-Party movement in 1957 in which a majority of the Presidium worked to oust Khrushchev from power.<sup>25</sup> Furtseva was instrumental in protecting Khrushchev's position as it was reported that "she made a six-hour speech to detain the progress of the anti-Party group until Khrushchev's supporters from the various republics could be brought into Moscow."<sup>26</sup> In effect, Furtseva filibustered the Presidium for six hours while Khrushchev's supporters were in transit to Moscow so that she could buy time for their arrival and garner the support he needed to remain in office until 1960. While filibustering is a common idea in Western politics, particularly in the United States, such an action was virtually unheard of in the Soviet Union during the Cold War. For Furtseva to have gone to such lengths to protect Khrushchev gives credence to her tenacity and political foresight. Without her ability to stall the Presidium and give members from the Central Committee time to travel to Moscow and support Khrushchev, it is likely that Khrushchev would have lost his position in 1957, potentially leading to a completely different history of the Cold War in which different, less tolerant Communist leaders may have been elected.

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<sup>24</sup> "Furtseva, Ekaterina (1910–1974)," *Women in World History: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, Encyclopedia, accessed April 2, 2019, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/furtseva-ekaterina-1910-1974>.

<sup>25</sup> The Presidium was a governmental organization in the Soviet Union that functioned as a collective head of state for the Soviet Union.

<sup>26</sup> Ciboski, "A Woman in Soviet Leadership," 8.

Madame Furtseva's transition into the second phase of her political career as the Minister of Culture under Leonid Brezhnev was thanks in no small part to Nikita Khrushchev's fall from power. Furtseva was an outspoken defendant of Khrushchev and openly supported many of his policies. When Khrushchev was ousted by Brezhnev, his supporters were also removed from their positions to make way for allies who were loyal to the new leader. Furtseva's close ties to Khrushchev which had led to her to such a prominent role in the Komsomol ultimately brought about her fall from grace, as Brezhnev could not guarantee her loyalty to his policies. However, unlike many of Khrushchev's supporters who simply lost their positions and had to enter new careers, Furtseva was valued for her political abilities and was kept on in the government as the Minister of Culture. As the Minister of Culture for the Soviet Union from 1960 to 1974, her political impact shifted from one of strict policy for the Soviet Union to a diverse role covering the cultural life for all Soviet citizens. Furtseva found new purpose as the Minister of Culture whose job it was to execute policies directed by the political bodies of the Soviet Union dealing with aspects of culture within the country, including such varied subjects as literature, art, music, and theater. The new minister took to her position with relish as she saw the importance of her work as it impacted the propaganda of the Communist party and the Soviet Union at large. Professor Ciboski commented that "Madame Furtseva long had been concerned with cultural matters, beginning with her early Party propaganda work and continuing to her defense of the de-Stalinization campaign and fight against the anti-Party group. The philosophical and political issues at the heart of these latter tensions were expressed in literature and art, as the instruments of propaganda."<sup>27</sup> With her concern to spread party propaganda messages through the medium of different cultural niches in the Soviet Union, Furtseva would unwittingly negatively impact the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 10.



political situation in the Soviet Union, bringing about civil unrest and the ultimate fall of Communism through the spread of new ideas courtesy of new cultural media.

Arguably her most important impact as the Minister of Culture was through her dramatic expanse of cultural exchanges between the Soviet Union and foreign countries. Furtseva took it upon herself to help broaden the cultural experiences of the common people in the Soviet Union, as well as spread the cultural values of the Soviet Union to the rest of the world in an effort to proclaim the superiority of her society. It was described that due to Furtseva's efforts to expand the cultural experiences of the Soviet people, "Not only did Russians get a chance to see Hollywood movies and hear Western jazz, but Western audiences were given an opportunity to see classical Russian ballet and hear superb Soviet musicians. The end of Stalin's self-imposed cultural isolation was itself a breath of fresh air for the Soviet artistic community, and indirectly it contributed to the pressures for further liberalizations."<sup>28</sup> By allowing for a greater amount of contact between the West and the Soviet Union, Furtseva unintentionally helped with the ultimate collapse of communism in her home country. As she allowed more Western media into the East, Western ideas began to spread among the youth of the Soviet Union, leading them to distance themselves from the government which often failed to provide basic consumer goods necessary for survival.

Yekaterina Furtseva provided the Soviet Union with its first real example of a successful woman politician, and her efforts paved the way for more women to be accepted for their service in the lower levels of government. In her roles as "Both [a] party secretary and [a] government minister she had shown herself to be a competent, hard-working and firm-spoken administrator

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<sup>28</sup> "Furtseva, Ekaterina (1910–1974)."

who was politically reliable and ideologically flexible.”<sup>29</sup> Her efforts to support Khrushchev and bring about a quasi-cultural revolution helped to bring the Soviet Union to a position of incredible strength and influence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. With this high level of international influence, the Soviet Union was able to reach out in both the East and the West and send its agents to keep it informed of current and future developments which may have negatively impacted the strength of the Communist nation. These agents, better known as spies, would come to play a significant role in the Cold War, as ordinary people like Ethel Gee turned against their countries for a myriad of personal and professional reasons which ultimately led to an increase in global political tensions.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

**Ethel Gee**



Figure 4: Ethel “Bunty” Gee pictured with her lover Harry Houghton<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hannah Baker, “The Spy Next Door,” *Dorset Magazine*, January 11, 2011, <https://www.dorsetmagazine.co.uk/people/the-spy-next-door-1-1642538>.

Perhaps the most controversial woman included in this thesis, Ethel Gee is unfavorably remembered in Western history as a member of the Portland Spy Ring. For the purpose of this thesis, just as with each woman studied prior and following, she will not be judged positively or negatively for her actions as a spy. Rather, it is imperative to understand what it is that the Portland Spy Ring did, its overall impact on the Cold War, and the role Ethel Gee played in ensuring the success of the spy ring. However, even before the Portland Spy Ring can be examined, Ms. Gee should be studied to understand her particular vulnerability and susceptibility which led her to take part in one of Britain's most infamous cases of espionage during the Cold War.

Ethel Elizabeth Gee, known to her friends by the nickname "Bunty," was a local woman born in 1914 from Dorset, England. When thinking of female spies, the socially popular image that comes to mind is of a lady like Mata Hari, a young, sultry woman who uses her charms as a femme fatale to trick covert information from unsuspecting, foolhardy men.<sup>31</sup> This image could not be further from reality for the case of Ms. Gee. Recently released M15 files are actually quite unflattering of her character, painting her as a rather plain woman who would never have been thought of as a successful Soviet spy.<sup>32</sup> Specifically, there is one note which disdainfully describes Ethel Gee as 'plain in appearance and speaking with a fairly strong Dorset accent, it would be hard to find someone further removed from the popular conception of the female spy than Miss "Bunty" Gee.'<sup>33</sup> For nearly 40 years she lived alone, taking care of her aging parents

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<sup>31</sup> Mata Hari, otherwise known as Margaretha Geertruida "Margreet" MacLeod, was a Dutch exotic dancer who turned spy for the Germans during World War I.

<sup>32</sup> M15 is the United Kingdom's domestic counter-intelligence and security agency. It is comparable to the CIA, or Central Intelligence Agency, in the United States.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Lea, "MI5 Portland: Newly released documents reveal Dorset's role in one of the most important KGB spy rings of the Cold War." *Daily Echo*, November 28, 2017, [https://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/news/15687510.mi5-portland-newly-released-documents-reveal-dorsets-role-in-one-of-the-most-important-kgb-spy-rings-of-the-cold-war/.MI5 Portland Newly Released Documents](https://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/news/15687510.mi5-portland-newly-released-documents-reveal-dorsets-role-in-one-of-the-most-important-kgb-spy-rings-of-the-cold-war/.MI5%20Portland%20Newly%20Released%20Documents).

and being employed as a records clerk at the Underwater Detection Establishment, hereafter referred to as UDE, for the Portland office. UDE was a naval base for the British in which restricted documents were kept and protected from the Soviets who were looking to improve their own underwater craft. Working her job and left alone to care for her elderly parents, Gee was particularly emotionally vulnerable, living in a time in which women were allowed to work and have a career but were still expected to marry and have a family. Not to do so was seen disfavorably, and the single woman would be heavily judged by society for her inability to be married and the character defects which must be inherent for her to be unable to find a husband. Suffering under this intense pressure and societal judgement, Gee found herself to be vulnerable and easily manipulated when a recent divorcee named Harry Houghton began to work as a clerk alongside her at the Portland office.

The story of Harry Houghton is quite simple. From 1951-52 he served as a clerk to the British naval attaché in Warsaw where he was subsequently relieved of his post and sent back to the United Kingdom for heavy drinking. It was during his time in Warsaw that Houghton was first contacted by the Soviets who began to groom him to espionage by conditioning him to the pleasures of serving the Soviets through passionate affairs and dealing in illicit substances for extra spending money. Upon returning to London and being placed at UDE, he was again approached by the Soviets, this time for any information about the work at the base along with other details he could provide in exchange for a lucrative reward. Being new to the world of espionage, Houghton was careless and left these sensitive documents for his wife Peggy to find, upon which she decried his actions to his superiors and, believing these were simply the cries from an unhappy marriage, he was only moved away from classified material to the repair unit

office.<sup>34</sup> Houghton at this point would have been considered worthless to the Soviets had it not been for his relationship with Ethel Gee. While Houghton was being scrutinized at UDE, he had a scandalous relationship with the thirty-eight-year-old woman, an affair which predated his divorce to his wife. Where Houghton had been relegated to the sidelines, Ethel Gee had a clean record with access to highly classified material at UDE.

It was thanks in no small part to Gee's access to sensitive documents and records that the Portland Spy Ring was able to operate, using Gee and Houghton to smuggle documents from UDE into the hands of their handler Gordon Lonsdale who in turn was able to pass the classified material off to the husband-wife duo Peter and Helen Kroger.<sup>35</sup> From this point, the Krogers were able to relegate the documents into the hands of Soviet officials who were able to use the information for their own developments and advancements. It was believed by British officials at the time that the stolen secrets "helped the Soviet Union construct a new and more silent class of submarine several years faster than if the Portland Spy Ring had not existed."<sup>36</sup> Though the Krogers would go on to become more well-known in the United States by virtue of their status as former American citizens, it is truly thanks to Ethel Gee that the Portland Spy Ring saw the level of success it did before its collapse in 1961 when all five members were arrested by M15 thanks in part to information provided by the CIA in the United States. Had it not been for Gee, the other members would not have had access to such restricted information, and while the Soviets

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<sup>34</sup> Norman Lucas, *The Great Spy Ring* (London: Arthur Barker Limited, 1966), 145.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon Lonsdale acted as the master spy in the Portland Spy Ring. He presented himself under the aliases "Alex Johnson," and American Embassy Naval Attaché and "Gordon Arnold Lonsdale," a Canadian business man, while in reality he was a Soviet named "Konon Molody." Peter and Helen Kroger were a married couple whose true identities were Morris and Lona Cohen, an American couple belonging to the Communist Party USA.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Fitsanakis, "MI5 releases new information about Soviet 'Portland Spy Ring,'" *Intelnews*, last modified November 28, 2017, <https://intelnews.org/2017/11/28/01-2222/#comments>.

would have made do with the initial information collected by Houghton, with Gee's assistance the Portland Spy Ring was able to make a far greater impact in the realm of the Cold War.

What then could have motivated Ethel Gee to turn against her country during such a polarizing time in which all Communists were painted as evil incarnate by Western democracies and vice versa? For most individuals involved with espionage, the normal trigger to turn against the home country comes from a falling out in which the spy feels that they have been slighted and have not received the respect they were due. This was certainly part of the case for Harry Houghton, who was recruited by the KGB after being fired from his post in Warsaw. For Ethel Gee, the situation is slightly more complicated. One of her main motivations was monetary. The salary of a clerk for UDE certainly was not extravagant, but the monetary rewards for providing credible information and secrets to the Soviet Union was quite substantial, and as Ethel Gee was exposed to the potential rewards of her espionage activities by Houghton, she certainly must have felt some draw to the money she could stand to gain. It was even reported that she was a "£10-a-week woman [and thus] was easily impressed."<sup>37</sup> Being introduced to the night life and local status of a celebrity with Houghton and his money earned from illicit activities most certainly whet Ms. Gee's appetite for a more prosperous future.

Another, more controversial, motivation for Gee was love. While legal councils focused on the monetary gains of espionage activity during her trial in 1961, Ethel Gee pronounced herself as an innocent girl smitten with her boyfriend and going along with his requests. As a woman in her forties who most likely believed herself doomed to be a "spinster" for the rest of her life, the image of Harry Houghton coming into the office and sweeping her off her feet must

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<sup>37</sup> Lucas, *The Great Spy Ring*, 143.

have been quite the shock. Such a woman was easily open to emotional manipulation such as going along with the requests of her new boyfriend despite the most obvious rules at UDE to not disclose sensitive information outside of the workplace. Gee herself was quoted as saying, “At the time I did not feel I was doing wrong. I see now it was very wrong.”<sup>38</sup> Understandably, arguing for the sake of love in a 1960s British courtroom as motive for espionage activity was not a sensible course, nor could it have been argued as the only motivation for her actions. Clearly, there was a level of financial gain that Ms. Gee enjoyed. It also cannot be argued that she was completely naïve and did not understand that on some level, what she was doing was illegal. What can be argued is that Ms. Gee was not a simple woman, and that no single factor can be determined to be the cause for her actions, but rather a combination of a desire for a more profitable life alongside her passion and respect for her boyfriend brought her to this consequential decision to turn traitor against her country.

Unfortunately, little information has been published about Ms. Ethel Gee herself; most information available about her comes from general publicized information about the Portland Spy Ring in its entirety. As is common with spies, they prefer to keep their true identities out of the public eye, and any who are unmasked often try to maintain a low-profile afterward to avoid as much scrutiny and judgement as possible. Considering her public image in the United Kingdom following her arrest, conviction, and sentence of 15 years in prison, it is no wonder that she refrained from writing a memoir or an autobiography prior to her death in 1984. Furthermore, many files from M15, including files about the Portland Spy Ring, have only

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<sup>38</sup> Hannah Baker, “The Spy Next Door,” *Dorset Magazine*, January 11, 2011, <https://www.dorsetmagazine.co.uk/people/the-spy-next-door-1-1642538>.



recently been released in the United Kingdom.<sup>39</sup> Depending on the sensitivity of the information, some documents may not be released to the public for many years to come. What little information has been published is largely the work of newspaper journalists who have some level of interest either in the entirety of the Portland Spy Ring or in Gee herself. One such enthusiast is Ms. Hannah Baker, a writer for *Dorset Magazine* who, in January 2011 published a story about Ms. Gee in connection to the author's family. Interestingly, Ms. Baker's great-aunt was actually a close friend to Bunty, both being spinsters and finding comfort in each other's presence. Many members of Baker's family lived in Portland near Ms. Gee, and would spend time working alongside her at UDE, singing and playing the piano together at family get-togethers, and generally viewing Bunty as part of the family. With such a strong, personal tie to Gee's story, it is no wonder that Baker ensures to discuss her in a positive light, focusing on Gee's claims of naivety and innocence in the matter of the Portland Spy Ring. Baker also made sure to fulfill her responsibility as a journalist by including damning information about Gee's true depth of involvement with the Portland Spy Ring. The author included a section in her article in which she discussed the financial incentives to Gee's crime, remarking that:

An examination of Gee's bank accounts revealed [an] uncharacteristically large amount of money had passed through them. She was also believed to be successful in dealing with stocks and shares. [At the trial in 1961] in his summing up, the Lord Chief Justice said of Bunty: A lot depends on what you thought of Miss Gee. Do you think she is quite as dim-witted as she and her counsel would have you believe? The residents of Portland,

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<sup>39</sup> It has been announced that in May 2020 the book *Dead Doubles: the Portland Spy Ring and the Hunt for the KGB's Greatest Illegals* by Trevor Barnes will be published. While it was unavailable at the time this thesis was written, it is highly recommended that the reader examines this publication for a fuller understanding of the Portland Spy Ring.

including members of my family, certainly didn't recognize this 47-year-old local woman as a calculating traitor who was quietly accruing a small fortune for herself.<sup>40</sup>

Baker truly does her best as a journalist with a personal investment in this story to present information looking at Ethel Gee from all sides, as a human being with faults and flaws as well as a woman with friends and family who cared deeply for her and could never have suspected by her character alone that she could turn against her home country.

Ethel Gee truly is a controversial figure, much like the other women featured in this thesis. Where the other women have been controversial for their political stances and decisions made either in office or for the purpose of influencing other politicians, Gee stands out through her steadfast approach not on the official political stage, but through backhanded dealings which gave a political advantage to the Soviet Union. The final woman in this thesis shares one trait in common with Gee; she did not hold political office yet still was able to make an impact through her personal life. Samantha Smith, a female unlike any other in this paper, was only a girl when her personal choices rocked the political climate of the Cold War for both the Soviet Union and the United States.

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<sup>40</sup> Baker, "The Spy Next Door."

## Samantha Smith



Figure 5: Samantha Smith at Camp Artek receiving the traditional bread and salt welcome <sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Khusanova, "Samantha Reed Smith," *My Hero*, last modified February 23, 2015, [https://myhero.com/S\\_Smith\\_aichurek\\_KG\\_2015\\_ul](https://myhero.com/S_Smith_aichurek_KG_2015_ul).

Rounding out such a group of high-profile, enterprising women is perhaps the least likely person to be expected to make a significant personal impact on the political tensions of the Cold War. Standing tall among her fellows at a mere ten years old, Samantha Smith was America's Youngest Ambassador and was beloved not only in her home country but also in the Soviet Union. Samantha was a simple girl born in Houlton, Maine, in 1972 to Jane and Arthur Smith. For the first ten years of her life, she grew up alongside the other girls in her town, playing with her friends, going to school, and always under the threat of nuclear annihilation from the Soviet Union. Initially, Samantha may not have been aware of the full implications of growing up in the Cold War due to her young age and lack of experience of a world in which nuclear weapons did not exist. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, it would have been impossible for anyone to be ignorant of the constant threat of nuclear attack, and as she grew older and watched the daily news cautioning against attacks and the effects of nuclear missiles, she began to question the world in which she lived, which seemed on the verge of destroying itself. Confused and concerned for her future, in 1982 Samantha turned to the wisdom of her mother and asked whether or not there would be a war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Her mother's response would change not only Samantha's life, but it would drastically alter the political tensions between the two Cold War superpowers.

Upon asking her mother if there would be a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union, Samantha was not given a straight yes or no answer. After all, no one really knew what would happen between the two quarreling superpowers. Instead, her mother showed Samantha a magazine in which the new General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Yuri Andropov, was pictured. Samantha recommended that her mother write to Mr. Andropov and ask him about the likelihood of war between the two countries. As a teaching

moment for her daughter, her mother replied that Samantha should be the one to write the new Soviet leader. Taking the advice to heart, Samantha wrote a short, simple letter to the General Secretary which reads:

Dear Mr. Andropov,

My name is Samantha Smith. I am ten years old. Congratulations on your new job. I have been worrying about Russia and the United States getting into a nuclear war. Are you going to vote to have a war or not? If you aren't please tell me how you are going to help to not have a war. This question you do not have to answer, but I would like to know why you want to conquer the world or at least our country. God made the world for us to live together in peace and not to fight.

Sincerely, Samantha Smith<sup>42</sup>

So much can be said unpacking and extrapolating this letter. Perhaps the most important things to understand are that this letter clearly reflects the writing abilities and vocabulary of a ten-year-old American girl. At the same time, the simple vocabulary relays the very deep-seated concerns held not only by Samantha, but also by most people in the world. No one wanted a nuclear war between the Americans and the Soviets, yet no one knew what was being done to prevent a war or could even predict if there would be a war. What diplomats, military leaders, and politicians spent years arguing and debating, a humble child from Maine stated clearly and honestly, looking for answers about an uncertain future.

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<sup>42</sup> Samantha Smith, *Journey to the Soviet Union* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), 4.

Following her first letter, Samantha was notified after several months by a reporter that her letter had been translated into Russian and published in the Soviet newspaper, *Pravda*. Upon hearing this and working with her father to find a copy of the article, Samantha wrote another letter, this time to Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, the head of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C. Since Andropov had failed to answer her initial letter, she asked Ambassador Dobrynin whether her letter would be answered by the Soviet leader. She also asserted that her questions in her first letter had been good questions after the *Pravda* article claimed her questions were merely the result of the misunderstandings of a ten-year-old. After sending this second letter, Samantha received a very special response from Yuri Andropov himself which read:

Dear Samantha,

I received your letter, which is like many others that have reached me recently from your country and from other countries across the world. It seems to me—I can tell by your letter—that you are a courageous and honest girl, resembling Becky, the friend of Tom Sawyer in the famous book of your compatriot Mark Twain. This book is well known and loved in our country by all boys and girls.<sup>43</sup> You write that you are anxious about whether there will be a nuclear war between our two countries. And you ask are we doing anything so that war will not break out. Your question is the most important of those that every thinking man can pose. I will reply to you seriously and honestly. Yes, Samantha, we in the Soviet Union are trying to do everything so that there will not be war between our countries, so that in general there will not be war on earth. This is what every Soviet

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<sup>43</sup> Yuri Andropov was familiar with the work of Mark Twain and enjoyed his literature. As a gesture of goodwill at the end of her visit to the Soviet Union, Samantha Smith gave Andropov a copy of *Tom Sawyer* along with a teddy bear from the University of Maine at Augusta where her father taught.

man wants. This is what the great founder of our state, Vladimir Lenin, taught us... We want peace—there is something we are occupied with: growing wheat, building and inventing, writing books and flying into space. We want peace for ourselves and for all peoples of the planet. For our children and for you, Samantha. I invite you, if your parents will let you, to come to our country, the best time being the summer. You will come to find out about our country, meet with your contemporaries, visit an international children's camp—"Artek"—on the sea. And see for yourself: in the Soviet Union—everyone is for peace and friendship among peoples. Thank you for your letter. I wish you all the best in your young life.

Y. Andropov<sup>44</sup>

This letter, being far longer in length and representing the elegant vocabulary of a statesman, still reflects the honest feelings and concerns expressed in Samantha's letter. Andropov is not simply placating an anxious child but takes the time to truly think through his response, assuring her that not only is he not interested in sparking a nuclear war with the United States, as proof of his sincerity he wants Samantha and her parents to join him in the Soviet Union and have a goodwill tour of the country. During her tour she can it is interesting to see all of the amenities the Soviet Union has to offer and can see for herself how the Soviet Union is committed to peace. It is interesting that Andropov not only responded to Samantha's letter, but gave as honest and open an answer about the political situation between the two countries that he could give to a young American civilian.

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<sup>44</sup> Smith, *Journey to the Soviet Union*, 6-9.

The two-week journey throughout the Soviet Union during the summer of 1983 was a whirlwind experience for Samantha and her family. Even though she had no ties to politics and diplomacy beyond her personal letter to Andropov, Samantha was granted audiences with several high-ranking people in the Soviet Union. Zinaida Krouglova, head of all the Friendship Societies in the Soviet Union; Valentina Tereshkova, the first female cosmonaut; Ambassador Arthur Hartman, American ambassador to the Soviet Union; and Alla Cizova, the prima ballerina of the Kirov Ballet, were among the people who met with her to celebrate her trip and convince her that the Soviet Union wanted to maintain peace. Perhaps the highlight of her journey dealt with her visit to the Pioneer Camp at Artek, hereafter simply referred to as Artek. Artek was a summer camp in the Soviet Union which admitted only the best and brightest students to help encourage their talents while not in school. While at Artek, Samantha made friends with many of the other children, laughing and playing together towards the end of the one-month camp session. Though she was housed with students who could fluently speak English, Samantha found she was able to make friends even with those Soviet students who did not understand her language. It did not matter to anyone whether or not they could speak the same language, since play is a universal language between children which requires no translation. As Samantha traveled throughout the Soviet Union, she constantly discussed the difference between the Soviets and the Americans. What she noted was that, in contrast to the propaganda produced by either country, there were more similarities between the two societies than there were differences. Her ultimate conclusions, both about her new friends in the Soviet Union and general people across the world will be further analyzed later in this section.

As influential as her life and diplomacy in the Soviet Union were, her tragic death continued her mission for peace. On August 25, 1985, just two years after her visit to the Soviet



Union, Samantha Smith and her father passed away when their small plane crashed, killing them and six other people in Maine. Honoring her daughter's legacy, her mother returned to the Soviet Union one year after her death with 20 of her classmates, retracing Samantha's journey and accepting the gifts and condolences of the Soviets. Not only was the United States stunned by the loss of America's Youngest Diplomat, but the Soviet Union mourned her death as well. Mikhail Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Soviet Union following the death of Yuri Andropov, was quoted in the September 9, 1985 edition of *Time* magazine as saying that "everyone in the Soviet Union who has known Samantha Smith will forever remember the image of the American girl who, like millions of Soviet young men and women, dreamt about peace, and about friendship between the peoples of the United States and the Soviet Union."<sup>45</sup> American President Ronald Reagan offered his own condolences to the family, as did the American people, yet it is striking to see how Samantha's honesty and courage impacted the Soviet Union to such a degree that not only did the Soviet government reach out and mourn for her, but the people of the Soviet Union mourned en mass. The Soviet Union even went so far as to honor her memory by renaming a section of Artek "Samantha Smith Alley," publishing a postage stamp with her image, and naming a mountain after her.<sup>46</sup> Her commitment to maintaining peace by holding the Soviets accountable to their actions, while also insisting that the Americans and the Soviets shared more similarities than differences, ensured that her death would leave a resounding impact on the world.

Even at such a young age, Samantha Smith was highly focused on the relationship between the people of the United States and the Soviet Union. Having been inspired to write to

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<sup>45</sup> "Samantha Smith." *New World Encyclopedia*, last modified August 12, 2015.  
[http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Samantha\\_Smith](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Samantha_Smith).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

the Soviet Union by her mother in regard to the high tensions between the two countries, Samantha was motivated to support peace between the diametrically opposed societies to ensure the very survival of her society. After visiting the Soviet Union by the personal invitation of Yuri Andropov, she wrote the book *Journey to the Soviet Union*, which included not only the pictures taken by her family and a narrative of her adventure, but also her personal reflections and opinions on the people of the Soviet Union and the nature of the Cold War on a global scale.<sup>47</sup> When focusing on the Soviets themselves following her visit to the summer camp Artek, Samantha concluded of her new friends that "...we all got along so well together. I guess that's what I came to find out. I mean, if we could be friends by getting to know each other better, then what could our countries really be arguing about? Nothing could be more important than not having a war if a war would kill everything, That's the way it seems to me."<sup>48</sup> Though the word choice may be simplistic and reminiscent of a child, the meaning behind her words is anything but. Within a few short weeks she was able to understand what most full-grown adults spent years arguing over and trying to deny: that all people, regardless of their nation, cultural practices, or political beliefs, are at their core human beings. Humans live, laugh, and love, and ultimately fight for their own survival at all costs. Samantha understands that the odds of one country or the other initiating nuclear war is exceptionally low as both sides understand the cost of hitting the big red button is the end not only of the enemy culture, but of their own society as well.

Samantha went further than simply claiming that the children of the Soviet Union and the United States were representative of the similarities shared by all peoples of both countries. In

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<sup>47</sup> For a full description of her journey as well as over one dozen color pictures, refer to a copy of *Journey to the Soviet Union* by Samantha Smith.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, *Journey to the Soviet Union*, 49.

her book she concludes with a profound statement of simplicity and unity, with a hint of optimism in a time of great uncertainty. Her final statement about her journey to the Soviet Union and the lessons she learned is this:

The people of the world seem more like people in my own neighborhood. I think they are more like me than I ever realized. I guess that's the most important change inside me. Sometimes I still worry that the next day will be the last day of the Earth. But with more people thinking about the problems of the world, I hope that someday soon we will find the way to world peace. Maybe someone will show us the way.<sup>49</sup>

Samantha's young age cannot be overemphasized: her age when she wrote her first letter, when she visited the Soviet Union, and when she died. By the age of 13 her life was cut short, and yet her insights and honest thoughts speak to a woman far older and more experienced. Samantha was able not only to understand that humans are more connected by their similarities than divided by their differences but was also able to publish her conclusions for the rest of the world. It can be far easier to ignore the pleas for peace and community from politicians, since a cynical society can always pass off those claims as a simple tool to aid in polling data. It is far more difficult to dismiss the conclusions of a child, for even though they are young, and it is tempting to dismiss them for their youth, in reality their innocence allows them to see past the propaganda and the rivalries and find the crux of the problem. With insights like Samantha's it became far more difficult to ignore the similarities between the Soviets and the Americans, and as more similarities were uncovered, it became that much more difficult for politicians on either side of the Iron Curtain to claim that the societies were too dissimilar, and peace could not be reached.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 119.

Samantha was a girl ahead of her time, making significant political change through her work as an ambassador at the mere age of eleven. Her work stands apart from the decisions and impacts made by the prior four women studied and discussed. After looking at such a diverse group of women, it would be easy to say that the only feature they share is their gender, and that they were simply chosen at random for this project by the simple fact of their sex. In reality, they share more with each other than just their femininity. Their stories combine and contrast to show their true depth of character and strength of spirit.

## **Synthesis**

After examining the stories of these five women—Thatcher, Reagan, Furtseva, Gee, and Smith—the only commonality between them which is immediately clear is that these five women are exceptionally diverse from each other. Margaret Thatcher was an elected official of a democratic country with the political power to make her own policies without requiring the support of a male colleague. Nancy Reagan was the wife of a democratically elected leader and used her influence over her husband to enact change in the political world. Yekaterina Furtseva was the highest-ranking female member of the Soviet Politburo, and while she had the authority to make some decisions and enact political change, her position was precarious, and she had to rely on the strength of Nikita Khrushchev to maintain support in the politburo. Ethel Gee was a matronly secretary who turned traitor against her country for both the love of her life and for the allure of newfound wealth. Samantha Smith was a child with no political power whatsoever, but her decision to write a letter to the Soviet premier gave her a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make a difference in the relations between the East and the West by choosing to represent the United States on a goodwill of the Soviet Union. With such a diverse cast of characters, how were they chosen as representatives to show the true impact that women had on the political situation of the Cold War? On the surface, it appears that they have little, if anything, in common with one another. However, after truly explaining and coming to an understanding of the impacts they made through their determination, it becomes clear to see the common thread tying all five women together—their ability to enact historical change.

Returning to the first women described and studied, Margaret Thatcher and Nancy Reagan, it is not difficult to find the similarities and ties between their stories and their spirits. Both Thatcher and Reagan served as stalwart leaders for the West in the fight against

Communism. While Thatcher was an officially elected leader while Nancy Reagan was the wife of elected United States President Ronald Reagan, both held significant political power in their respective countries. Both held a substantial level of influence over Ronald Reagan and discussed their opinions and beliefs about the political climate and the best ways in which the West could move forward to combat the evils of Communism. Neither Thatcher nor Reagan were quick to back down from a challenge; the Iron Lady was no stranger to political discourse or challenges, both foreign and domestic, to her responsibility and political power. Reagan herself was also well aware of the backlash she and her husband would face from some of their more unpopular proposals, such as the Star Wars Defense Initiative. Despite the challenge to their status as individual leaders in their countries, both Thatcher and Reagan were unapologetically themselves and continued to serve and fight in the political arena of the Cold War in the ways which they understood to have the greatest potential benefit for their respective nations.

In examining the next leading lady, Yekaterina Furtseva provides an interesting foil to Thatcher and Reagan. Furtseva herself was an elected Party official with her own political power and authority to make impactful political decisions in the Soviet Union. She earned her position much like Thatcher, by understanding the mood of the country, becoming friendly with the top people in charge who could give her a promotion, and even making some charged criticisms about the current way affairs were run in Moscow. It was incredibly difficult, if nearly impossible, for a woman to earn any amount of political power in the Soviet Union as in their society; their calling was to motherhood alongside her duty to join the labor force. To join the political realm was simply unheard of for a good Soviet woman during the Cold War. Yet Furtseva was able to use her intellect and guile to earn her place as one of Nikita Khrushchev's

top underlings with the ability to both influence Khrushchev's decisions as well as enact her own decisions and reforms. Even after Khrushchev's fall from grace and Andropov's rise to power, Furtseva was still recognized for her political importance, and while she was demoted; she still retained political power and influence to continue to enact change in the Soviet Union. No one, either woman or man in the Soviet Union, would have been able to earn and retain a seat of substantial political power without having both the courage to risk fighting for the position amongst their other comrades and the tenacity to hold onto their political power against the infighting and double-crossing, which was standard in the Communist East. Furtseva had the strength of will and spirit to grasp and retain her political status in the face of many other competitors.

Ethel Gee, though without political power through officially elected means or through a husband, found a way to make her own political impact. Through her actions as a key member of the Portland Spy Ring, she ensured that the Soviet Union would have access to secret information from the British navy, which enabled the Communists to build a more silent type of submarine several years before they would have been predicted to have the capability to do so. The discovery of her treachery and the actions of the Portland Spy Ring heightened already high tensions between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union and would have made diplomatic relations even more difficult as the abysmally low level of trust was damaged even further. Where Thatcher, Reagan, and Gee had all been politically motivated through their love and respect of their mutual nations, Gee had a different motivation for her actions. She found strength through her newfound passion for her lover, Harry Houghton. Motivated by her emotions, along with a substantial amount of monetary compensation for her work, Gee understood that there were other motivations beyond blind patriotic and national pride. She saw

the importance of finding a partner with whom she could share her life and support in their endeavors.

The final woman discussed is Samantha Smith, the youngest person of political importance in this thesis. Where each of the previous woman achieved their political importance later in life, Samantha was only ten years old when she wrote her letter to Yuri Andropov, and she visited the Soviet Union after she had turned eleven. In many ways, Samantha can be compared to Nancy Reagan as an unofficial politician. Like Reagan, Smith was never elected into office; not only was she too old to legally run, but also neither of her parents were involved in politics, effectively cutting her off from that area of society. All the same, Samantha was treated with great respect and dignity after writing her letter to Andropov asking about the state of affairs between the United States and the Soviet Union. Both the Soviet and American media wanted to document the story of the little diplomat who would travel thousands of miles away from her home to enemy territory on a mission of peace and goodwill. Samantha drew her strength from her desire to see diplomatic relations between the two nations turn toward peace instead of constantly skirt the notion of nuclear war. Even in death, her ability to enact change lives on through the desire of the Soviet Union and the United States to honor her wishes for peace, as the two countries could find common ground through their love of America's Youngest Ambassador.

All five women—Thatcher, Reagan, Furtseva, Gee, and Smith—are drawn together through their conviction and strength of character. Whether they were motivated by love of country, love a partner, or love of peace, each woman refused to back down from the challenged meted out by life and stood up against the scrutiny and criticism garnered by their actions. These women all left their mark on the political actions and decisions of the Cold War by fighting for a



stronger position amongst their political adversaries, supporting the ambitions of the people they cared for, or working toward future in which diplomatic peace was attainable. Not just noteworthy, their actions and stories are of significant historic importance, and should be remembered and celebrated for the impact they had on one of the most tense and difficult periods in world history.

## **Conclusion**

Women did in fact made a significant impact on the political decisions of the Cold War in both the East and the West. Though this thesis focused solely on the contributions of Thatcher, Reagan, Furtseva, Gee, and Smith, there were countless other women who made their own contributions to the political theater of the Cold War. Some of these women were local politicians, others civil servants, and even more were simple housewives, making their voices known through their votes, or through the lessons taught to their children. While it may seem to be a revolutionary type of thinking to regard women as influential makers of history, in reality women have always had a strong role to play. Their historic contributions have only come to light in the past few decades as modern historians turn their focus away from the individual stories of powerful men and turn to the repressed and forgotten histories and impacts of the social minorities.

Even moving beyond the realm of politics, women played a key role in a myriad of different aspects of the Cold War, from the military to cultural values in the diametrically opposed societies of the Communist block and the Democratized West. As we continue to move forward and appreciate the ability of women to impact global events and enact historical change, it becomes increasingly obvious that all women have a story to share about their efforts to support their society and their loved ones to make a better future. We cannot, nor should we, dismiss the important roles women have played throughout history, and though their stories have only recently been remembered and brought back to light, their forgotten impact will always be seen in the historical record. Thanks to the efforts of women like Margaret Thatcher, Nancy Reagan, Yekaterina Furtseva, Ethel Gee, and Samantha Smith, women who refused to silence their voices and worked diligently to ensure their actions could not be forgotten, as a global

society we are continually becoming more aware of the true impact that women have had and will continue to have in our world.

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